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CITIZENS FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
*Corporate Responsibility Campaign*

**H.B. 5021 – An Act Implementing the Governor's Recommendations Concerning the Citizens' Election Program**

**H.B. 5022 – An Act Concerning the Citizens' Election Program**

My name is Karen Schuessler and I am the Director of Citizens for Economic Opportunity (CEO). CEO is a coalition of community and labor groups addressing health care reform and corporate responsibility.

I strongly support H.B.5021 and H.B. 5022. Clean elections are extremely important to democracy and to giving everyone an opportunity to run for elected office. Clean elections basically allow average people to run. Given the spiraling cost of campaigns, high-profile scandals and voter distrust of elected officials, clean elections are becoming increasingly important and should not be weakened.

The Citizens' Election Program is a program that works and thus it must be maintained. In the 2009 Connecticut General Assembly, 71% of State Representatives and 89% of State Senators were elected after participating in the Citizens' Election Program. Four minor party candidates in the House and one in the Senate qualified for the Citizens' Election Program.

The goal of public financing is to reduce the power that wealthy donors exert in campaigns and elections. Corporations are allowed to give millions of dollars to one candidate. One goal of clean elections is to ensure that politicians are serving their constituents rather than corporations. In 2006, less than half of the contributions to all candidates came from individuals. In 2008, 97% of contributions came from individuals giving qualifying contributions to candidates. This is such a positive step for democracy and a right step to move away from the influence of lobbyists and special interest giving.

I personally know people who are thinking of running for elected office but do not have the money to run. They are waiting to see if the Clean Election Program is viable before they make a decision. In 2008 in Connecticut there was a 50% increase in the number of contested primaries and in fact all of the winners of the 2008 primaries were Clean Election participants.

In addition, a Zogby poll released in January, 2010 found that 79% of Connecticut voters strongly support the Citizens' Election Program. When they were asked if the Governor and state legislature should act now to amend the program to comply with a district court ruling, 58% said they wanted elected officials to act so that the program can be available to candidates in 2010. The poll gave clear indications that voters are sick and tired of special interests in politics. In fact, 86% of those polled said they think that lobbyists and political insiders have more influence than average voters regarding the way election campaigns are financed.

In the past 14 months, \$38 million has been cut from the Citizens' Election Program. I realize the state is facing a huge deficit but I suggest elected officials look for ways to raise revenue instead of eliminating or weakening such an important program.

It is extremely important to return our government to the people. The voices of citizens should always be more important than corporate interests and special interests. The Preamble to the constitution begins with the line "We the People," and that is something that should never be forgotten in politics.

Karen Schuessler  
Director  
Citizens for Economic Opportunity  
860-674-0143